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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3221

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1513

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3566

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2952

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000923

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL ETTC KG

SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: AMBASSADOR OPENS BATKEN BORDER POST,
PART II

REF: A. BISHKEK 921

1B. BISHKEK 488

1C. BISHKEK 380

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Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: On August 11, the Ambassador opened a U.S.-funded border post along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border in the volatile southern Batken Oblast. During the event, a senior Border Service officer discussed the conflict in Afghanistan with the Ambassador and suggested that the West adopt a new approach to ending the war by focusing on economic development. Discussions with a World War II veteran at the luncheon highlighted the importance of strong relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, especially in disputed areas yet to be demarcated and delimited. This is Part II of a two cable series on the Ambassador's trip to the Batken Oblast. End Summary.

NEW APPROACH NEEDED IN AFGHANISTAN

12. (C) Colonel Mirzamatov opined that ISAF needed to develop a new approach to the war in Afghanistan, suggesting that the West focus on economic development as a way to counter opium production. Mirzamatov told the Ambassador that he was a veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan and that he and his colleagues now believe it was a grave mistake to invade the country. He also felt that the U.S. support for Afghanistan's mujahadeen had been equally erroneous.

13. (C) Mirzamatov claimed that the current war revolves around the production and sale of opium and not the Taliban's ideologies or the promotion of Sharia law. He said that the ISAF poppy eradication programs destroy crops, leaving farmers with no livelihood and forcing them to pick up arms. He suggested that the West create new employment opportunities by building factories and providing seeds for alternative crops. Mirzamatov dismissed the idea that the

economic situation in Batken was so dire that citizens would turn to narcotrafficking or radical Islam but reiterated his fears of incursions by foreign forces and the possibility of Kyrgyzstan becoming their safe haven.

LOCAL OFFICIAL DESCRIBES ECONOMIC SITUATION

¶ 14. (C) A local government official told Poloff that the world economic crisis was beginning to have an adverse effect on the region's economy. Tashtemir Salayev, a Kadamjai district administrator, claimed that the "world economic crisis is far-reaching and the small towns and villages of Batken are not immune." He claimed that many of the wire transfer offices such as Western Union, which were abuzz with activity only a year ago, are now void of clients and closing for good. Salayev said that the economic crisis had a "devastating impact on Kazakhstan and Russia, which in turn affected job opportunities and remittances for Kyrgyz citizens." He said that he noticed an influx of migrant workers returning to the area but sadly exclaimed that there were few employment opportunities to be found.

¶ 15. (SBU) However, he did assure the Ambassador that agriculture -- the backbone of Batken's economy -- is still flourishing. He cited robust production of potatoes, carrots, raspberries, melon, and watermelon, claiming that the latter is "the best in the world -- and very different from what they grow as watermelon around Bishkek."

STORIES AND TOASTS FROM A WORLD WAR II VETERAN

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¶ 16. (SBU) Officials also invited a World War II veteran to the luncheon where he spoke of his participation in battles with Nazi Germany and the importance of strong relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. He recalled deployments as a Soviet Army soldier to Ukraine and finally Berlin, where he participated in the siege of the city that eventually ended the war.

¶ 17. (SBU) His best friend had been a Ukrainian soldier, he said, showing a faded photograph of the two of them together. In a testimony to the uniformity of military uniforms -- and possibly the ethos of "homo sovieticus" -- the two young men appeared indistinguishable from each other, even though their ethnic backgrounds could not have been more different. The veteran laughed that his nave Ukrainian friend had pined for the war to end so that they could both go back to their respective homes. The veteran had not been sure that things would turn out so well, and sure enough, after the war they were both sent for 6 years of additional military duty in Vladivostok. "Stalin sent us," he explained, "and you didn't argue with that!"

¶ 18. (SBU) The WW II veteran, an Uzbek citizen residing in a disputed territory meters away from the new border post, raised his glass to toast the continued cooperation between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and emphasized the importance of peace between the two nations, particularly for those living along the border. While Kyrgyz-Uzbek tensions often run high, especially in the southern oblasts, it was striking with what respect and affection the local Kyrgyz notables treated the ancient warrior.

¶ 19. (SBU) The Ambassador presented the 84-year old father of seven and grandfather of 32 with a book depicting the American West in the nineteenth century, wherein he pointed to a Native American chieftain and exclaimed a striking resemblance to his own wife. (Note: Kyrgyz often claim that they share common ethnic roots with Native Americans. End Note)

COMMENT

¶10. (C) According to the Government, approximately 20 per cent of the border with Uzbekistan is not yet demarcated. The area around the new border post is indistinguishably divided between the two countries and loosely controlled by the border services of both governments. Upon leaving, the Ambassador heard a claim that the location of the lunch may have actually been Uzbek territory, a clear indication that Kyrgyzstan desperately needs to move forward in defining its territories and borders. In addition, the absence of demarcated and delimited borders may offer insurgents the opportunity to slip into and out of the country undetected.

GFOELLER